

## ROTHERFIELD PEPPARD: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Held at Peppard War Memorial Hall, GallowsTree Road, Rotherfield Peppard  
on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 10:00 am.

### Present:

**RPPC Councillors:** David Hammond (DH) - Chairman      LeeAnne Flett (LF)  
Tony Cotton (TC) – Vice Chair      Valerie Ross (VR)  
Fiona Berry (FB)

**RPPC Clerk:** Linda Collison (LC)

**Also present:** Carol Viney (OCC)      Paul Harrison (SODC)  
And 30 members of the public

### 1. Introduction and welcome:

DH introduced members of Rotherfield Peppard Parish Council present.

Linda Collison - Parish Clerk

Tony Cotton - Vice Chairman & Chairman of the Finance & Staffing Committee

Fiona Berry –Planning Committee

Leeanne Flett –Managing Carlings Orchard

Valerie Ross –Planning Committee

DH passed on apologies for the following members unable to attend:

Terry Ryan –Finance & Staffing Committee and has taken the lead on looking at establishing a Children's Playground

Hadley Cooper –Finance & Staffing Committee, Planning Committee and the Sports Pavilion and Field Management Committee

Simon Crouch – The Sports Pavilion and Field Management Committee (co-opted onto the Council in July of last year).

DH paid tribute to two Councillors who stood down during the year:

**“Nick Launders** was our longest serving councillor and my predecessor as Chairman. We regret that due to other commitments Nick decided to stand down in December but are delighted that he is continuing to help us with the Pavilion and also with Carlings Orchard. In fact Nick has spent the best part of two days in the Pavilion in the last week or so sorting out our electrics and some problems we have had with our electricity meters.

**Clive Mills** stood down in February having played a key role as Chairman of our Planning Committee and a leading and practical role in managing the Pavilion. We also regret that Clive decided to step down, but are delighted that Clive has agreed to take over the Chairmanship of the War Memorial Hall and look forward to working with him and his colleagues on the management committee on closer co-operation between this building and the pavilion.”

DH added that “we have two vacancies. It’s an interesting job – it can be frustrating – but it can also be very rewarding to see things move forward. The Council needs new ideas, new enthusiasm and new blood. So if you know anyone who would be interested in this”

DH also welcomed **Carol Viney** (Rotherfield Peppard’s County Councillor), **Paul Harrison** (Rotherfield Peppard’s District Councillor)

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### **2. Minutes of 2012 Annual Parish meeting**

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Annual Parish meeting held on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012 should be adopted as a true and accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

### **3. Chairman's Report. (DH)**

DH opened his report by thanking members of the Council and those that have supported the Council during the previous twelve months.

"Firstly to Linda Collison who took over as Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer of the Council in June 2011 on an unpaid basis. This was because the rules do not allow a Councillor to take a paid position with a council for at least 12 months after stepping down as a Councillor. I'm also delighted that Linda was appointed to the paid role in June of last year. Linda strives to improve the administration and operation of the Council and has great success. Our independent internal auditor who reviews all aspects of how we operate – and she does this not only for us but for other Councils - has commented that we are a role model for how a Parish Council should operate. If I could just give two examples: On her own initiative Linda has researched and come up with a bank account which will enable us to make electronic payments with the multi-signature approvals that are necessary in Parish Councils. This will save us getting individual cheques signed together with all the supporting paperwork at the end of long Council Meetings. She has also requested support for the installation of a simple accounting package to streamline the financial management of the Parish and reduce the number of hours – and hence cost – that the old method of book-keeping using various spread sheets, required. So thank you Linda.

Secondly – I have already paid tribute to Nick Launders and Clive Mills. I would also like to thank all my fellow Councillors. Being a Councillor means having to comply with a rather arcane and complex set of rules relating to how meetings should be conducted, how Councillors should behave and the rules regarding spending of public money. This can make it frustrating at times. It can also be hard work – especially doing the homework on Planning Applications, making sure you understand the accounts and keeping up with the stream of information about which decisions are required. It is great to have such a friendly and committed group of people who come together once a month to serve the Parish.

As well as thanking all my fellow Councillors I would like to thank Paul Harrison and Carol Viney for all the support they give us. We are very dependent on the District and County Councils. For Carol, it is her last few weeks as a County Councillor. I would like to thank Carol specifically for helping us with our initiative on roads and speeding traffic. She organised a meeting with the police and has got a 40 mph speed limit agreed for the area around Blounts Cross. Maybe not perfect – many would have liked it to be 30 mph – but a step in the right direction. She is not standing at the elections on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. After a request from one of the candidates at the election to come to this meeting, we have invited all the candidates. David Bartholomew (the Conservative Candidate) is planning to be here a little later. The others have declined.

South Oxfordshire District Council has had another good year. Efficiencies have resulted in lower Council Tax charges for the coming year. The new Core Strategy setting out planning policies and housing allocation to 2027 has now been issued following a long consultation and inspection. The next District Council Elections will be held with new boundaries. We will no longer be with Sonning Common, but with 9 other parishes to form the new Woodcote and Rotherfield Ward.

## **ROTHERFIELD PEPPARD: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

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on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 10:00 am.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank all those unsung heroes around the Parish who do so much to make this a special place to live. The Peppard Revels Team, the Peppard News team, the Cricket Club, the Kingwood and Peppard Commons Volunteers, the Green Gym – the list goes on. Thank you all.

So what have been the particular highlights of the last year? In looking back over a very busy year I was struck by how much of our business in the last 12 months has been driven from the outside – by government initiatives, or by events outside our control. In dealing with these I think our overriding objective has been to preserve all that residents' value about the local area and local community. As we deal with the external questions we have also been focussed on making progress on the initiatives identified as a result of the Community Plan Survey two years ago. Some may say we haven't gone far enough or fast enough. To those I say, come and join us and help us.

So what are these external changes? One of these was a rewriting of the Code of Conduct for Parish Councils last spring. The Localism Act introduced the changes and there then followed endless discussions as the "great and the good" tried to decide how to implement the change. In the end, we along with all other Councils had to agree and adopt a new Code with new definitions – including "Pecuniary Interest" which replaces the "Prejudicial Interest" and "Personal Interest" of the old system. In many ways the new system is weaker than the old – but it is now a criminal offence to fail to declare a pecuniary interest in a Council decision.

Another change has been the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans. We will come back to this later, but the Government's objective was to delegate more decisions to local communities to enable more sustainable development to take place. As a result of Sonning Common deciding to produce a Neighbourhood Plan, there have been many discussions about the boundary of the Neighbourhood Area in relation to the plan and how consultation should take place with residents who live outside the area. Again – more no this later.

Road closures associated with the Henley Triathlon have caused concern to residents and businesses across South Oxfordshire in the last two years. When one of the options was for the cycle route to come right through Rotherfield Peppard in September with resulting 12 hour road closures right through the village, the Council decided that it needed to express a view. With the Church and several local businesses facing closure for the day with no compensation and 142 households being trapped in their houses for the day, the Council did its homework and leafleted the affected households. As a result of our representations, the route was not adopted and the new proposed route for this September doesn't enter the parish – but will close the main routes from here into Henley for the day. I have attended two meetings organised by John Howell MP to try and get the race organisers and Oxfordshire County Council to engage better with the local community. The result has been broken promises and arrogance which has been deeply frustrating for many of the parishes involved. I personally went to Oxfordshire County Council to support a motion designed to highlight the problems caused and was disappointed that the Deputy Chair of the Council who has enthusiastically backed the commercial organisers of this event – was absent.

We have also faced pressure of a different sort from some of our parishioners. As a result of the Community Survey, a group was formed to look at the feasibility of installing a children's play area in the Parish. After several meetings of the group, it appeared that only one site was being considered and this was on the Sports Field. This suggestion, in turn, resulted in some vociferous objections from local residents – even before the Parish Council had been presented with any details. You may have seen the strong criticisms of the Parish Council in letters to

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Peppard News. The Parish Council responded to a request from the group looking at this to be given clear terms of reference. The Parish Council has also agreed to support further work on using a site on the top common as a possible play area location. There will be problems with this site – it is subject to the 1906 Nettlebed and District Commons Act and therefore permanent fencing may be an issue. These are issues to be addressed and resolved in a spirit of co-operation not confrontation. I would encourage those who support this initiative to come forward and help make it a reality.

We have also faced pressure from one Parishioner who has sent the Council a number of Freedom of Information requests and other requests in which he challenges the Council's handling of the land registration of the Sports Field in 2004. Handling these requests has been extremely time consuming and have resulted in a large amount of documentation which includes a 107 page dossier prepared by this individual which includes various documents from the parish and elsewhere on the subject of local land ownership. The Parish Council has taken advice and is clear that it has full title to the Sports Field. The Council has considered the matter and decided that it is not prepared to spend time and money considering the history of the matter going back 100 years. However the Parishioner continues to challenge the Council with allegations and requests for information. In my view, the Parish Council has no obligation to continue to respond to an individual's complaints – unless they are seen to have a wider relevance to the community in general.

In spite of all these distractions, the Council has also continued to work on other things. Planning is probably the most important and time consuming activity – and Fiona Berry will cover that later.

There has been real progress this year in getting the Sports Pavilion used more and I'm delighted that we now have the Hearn's Arts Group and Kinder Musik as regular users. We also have Rotherfield United Football Club using the ground to meet capacity shortfalls at their main ground at Bishopswood. Improvements have been made to the Pavilion and more are planned.

The Council was pleased to fund the Brush cutting Course attended by members of the Kingwood and Peppard Common Volunteer group last year and looks forward to continuing to support the work of maintaining our commons.

There have been meetings about improvements to Broadband Speeds in the area. If you remember, this was a key topic raised at this meeting last year. We are expecting the results of the tendering exercise being undertaken by Oxfordshire County Council in the next few months. This will result in the expenditure of around £15 million in the county to improve communications infrastructure – mainly through the installation of fibre optic cables and cabinets with the objective of giving access to high speed broadband to 90% of the population by 2015.

Roads and Speeding Traffic is a perennial issue. During the year the road markings at the Gallowstree Road / Stoke Row Road junction have been improved. We also had a period of increased speed monitoring down the Stoke Row Road. However accidents continue to happen and we all have a responsibility to drive within the speed limit and be careful. Hopefully the new speed limit at Boults Cross will help going forward.

## **ROTHERFIELD PEPPARD: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

Held at Peppard War Memorial Hall, GallowsTree Road, Rotherfield Peppard  
on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 10:00 am.

We have had meetings with Peppard News about setting up a village website and possibly including a "bulletin board" facility.

The Council continues to maintain Carlings Orchard – and it's lovely to see the daffodils in bloom at the moment. To make it a safer place for young children to play, the Council is installing a new gate across the access from Wyfold Lane. This is being funded by a grant from Oxfordshire County Council and is being installed at no cost to the Parish by the Green Gym. Many thanks to LeeAnne Flett for driving this, to Carol Viney for getting us the grant and to the Green Gym for installing.

There is much to be done. Whatever the issue, the Parish Council needs to understand your views. There's lots of information on the Parish Council website – and there's also a facility to send us a message. Use it – let us know what you want – and help us make Rotherfield Peppard an even better place to live."

#### **4. Financial Statement to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 (TC)**

"In that year we had a Precept – our income from your Council Tax - of £22547. For the middle ranking Band D house this is £ 24.84 per month

Our major item of expenditure is wages and National Insurance etc for our Clerk and two other part time employees totalling £8,103. We also spent £2,093 supporting the Sports Field and Pavilion Charity. As well there were other Grants – donations - to local organisations amounting to £1,685.

In total we had a surplus of receipts over payments of £2429 which is added to our reserves making a total at the end of the year of £15,747 – about what is recommended for a Council of our size. We also have assets – benches salt bins railings etc with an insurance value of £ 43,603. This excludes the Pavilion which I will mention in a moment.

In this year just started we will receive a Precept of £27094 - an increase which you may have read about in the press - of 20%. The reasons for this are that we want to continue the improvements to the Pavilion so as to further increase the hirings. Further work is also required in Carlings Orchard. Another reason is that for part of the year just finished Linda remained an unpaid Volunteer- thank you Linda. The extra cost is partially mitigated by planned reduced hours.

I have mentioned the Sports Field and Pavilion which is a Charity run by the Council. They have separate accounts and the draft unaudited figures show that they spent £3497 more than their income mainly on improvements such as modernising the showers and water heating. This means their reserves fell to £10442 at the end of the year. They also have assets with an insurance value of almost £199,305".

#### **5. Planning report. For the year 2012-13 (FB)**

"I am giving this report on behalf of the Planning Committee as we do not have a Chairman after the resignation of Clive Mills in March. He was an excellent Parish councillor for three and a half years and was diligent and hardworking on the planning Committee and is missed greatly.

The Committee is a complete team effort, other members being Tony Cotton, and Valerie Ross, David Hammond (Ex-officio in his capacity as Chairman of the Council.) LeeAnne Flett and

## **ROTHERFIELD PEPPARD: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

Held at Peppard War Memorial Hall, GallowsTree Road, Rotherfield Peppard  
on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 10:00 am.

Terry Ryan also assist on occasions, and our Parish Clerk Linda Collison does an excellent job with the administration. We do have a vacancy at the moment but Hadley Cooper is joining in the interim until we can get a new councillor. Many thanks to them all.

We have had a most interesting and busy year with 57 planning applications, slightly down from 67 applications last year. A number are for new residents in the parish and we would like to extend a warm welcome to them all.

Details of all planning applications are available on the SODC planning portal and this year the Planning Officer's report is also published. For those of you who do not have access to the internet paper copies of applications can be viewed by making an appointment with our Parish Clerk. The agendas and minutes of our meetings which include the Parish council's recommendation can be found on our website [www.rppc.org.uk](http://www.rppc.org.uk). We have planning meetings twice a month and members of the public are welcome to attend and can comment on applications during the Public forum at the beginning of the meeting.

The Localism Bill was mentioned by the Chairman earlier. This changes the way planning policies are developed and delivered so that more decisions can be made at the local level. SODC have started the process of revising the District's Planning Policies so that instead of a single Local Plan there will be a framework of documents addressing specific areas of Planning Policy that can be reviewed and amended more frequently. The first part of this the Core Strategy was adopted in December 2012. This is good news for the Parish as a number of Councils have not reached this stage yet.

The concept of Neighbourhood Plans was introduced by the Localism Act which allows parishes to create a vision for their town or village and create planning policies which supplement the national and local framework to support that vision. Sonning Common has decided to develop a Neighbourhood Plan as they are one of the larger villages which have to accommodate development under the SODC Core Strategy. One of the potential development sites called SON13 is actually in Rotherfield Peppard Parish. We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Sonning Common Parish Council so this plot can be included in the Neighbourhood Area. This means that it will be evaluated in relation to all the other sites during the planning process. This was considered to be the best approach for both Parishes because not including it would mean that control of the site would remain with SODC and any neighbourhood plan policies to make it fit with the rest of Sonning Common would not apply. Our agreement with Sonning Common also means that the parish will be consulted on the development of the Neighbourhood Plan and a representative will be able to attend meetings and report back.

Our assessment of Planning Applications are based on the policies in the Core Strategy and the South Oxfordshire Design Guide which gives more detailed guidance on developments to ensure they enhance the character of the area. As the majority of the parish is in the Chilterns AONB and the Rotherfield Peppard Conservation area covers the area of the 'top common' we are always concerned to ensure that developments complement and enhance the area so that it retains the characteristics that make it so attractive. The Planning Committee makes site visits wherever possible and hopes that we do not catch too many people in their pyjamas as it is usually early on a Saturday morning.

## ROTHERFIELD PEPPARD: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Held at Peppard War Memorial Hall, GallowsTree Road, Rotherfield Peppard  
on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 10:00 am.

### Summary of Planning Applications 2012-13 Rotherfield Peppard Parish

Total Applications	57
With drawn	4
	53

Decisions:		RPPC Recommend				
		Approval	Refusal	No Strong Views		
SODC	Approve	32	9	2	43	96%
	Refuse		2		2	4%
	Tbc	4	4		8	
		36	15	2	53	
		68%	28%	4%		

Of the 57 applications, 4 were withdrawn, 43 were approved and 8 are still awaiting determination. Of the 2 refused by SODC the development adjacent to Mulberry House was approved after appeal.

The applications were for a variety of reasons - 50% being extensions.

Extension	26
New Build	3
Rebuild	3
Shed	1
Pet enclosure	1
Stable	1
Conservatory	1
J Matthey	2
Manor Farm	2
Gates / Fencing	2
Garage	4
Amendment/Resubmission	7
	53

7 applications were recommended for refusal by the Planning Committee but approved by SODC. In the majority of cases this was because it was amended in discussions with the SODC Planning Officer.

Unfortunately we have occasions where developments are carried out without permission and the Planning Committee becomes involved in the Planning Enforcement process. Breaches in planning control at Manor Farm required the termination of some activities which were eventually complied with. However the activities have been moved to an alternative location on Manor Farm and are still operating without planning permission. This is being followed up by SODC Planning Enforcement.

## **ROTHERFIELD PEPPARD: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

Held at Peppard War Memorial Hall, GallowsTree Road, Rotherfield Peppard  
on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 10:00 am.

There are also regulations that control the display of signs particularly those that advertise commercial activity. In some parts of the village the number and position of signs detracted from the rural outlook and were a potential distraction to drivers. Where a sign is displayed without permission the Planning Committee has requested that the signs are either removed or permission is sought for their retention. In the majority of cases this request has been complied with but there are some signs that are still being displayed and the cases will be escalated to highways to deal with.

Overall most applications are approved. However there are always pressures from developers who wish to take advantage of the setting and desirability of living in this location. We therefore have to continue to ensure that the Parish stays vibrant while retaining the character of the area.”

### **6. Commons Report (TC)**

“Jeremy Simon - the Chairman of the Nettlebed and District Commons Conservators unfortunately cannot be here today - and sends his apologies. He has asked me to say a few words about the Commons and the Conservators.

I am the newest of the nine Conservators and was appointed by South Oxfordshire District Council 18 months ago.

There are 8 Commons totalling more than 560 acres in the Nettlebed and District Commons and they are governed by a 1906 Act of Parliament and some Bye-laws. If you have not read it I encourage you to read the The Nettlebed and District Commons (Preservation) Act 1906. It is less than a dozen pages long and has the Edwardian virtue of being very clearly and simply written. It is easily found on the internet or on the Conservators website [www.nettlebed-commons.org](http://www.nettlebed-commons.org). Common Land does have an owner and the majority of the Nettlebed Commons are owned by the Nettlebed Estate but there are other land owners including the Parish Council who own on behalf of a Charity the Sports Field on Peppard Common.

Rotherfield Peppard is lucky to have two of the Nettlebed and District Commons in its area. Peppard Common stretches from the Red Lion and the school all the way to the Sports Pavilion on the Stoke Row Road. A total of 53 acres including the nearly 7 acre Sports Field. Kingwood Common is 146 acres mainly sandwiched between the Stoke Row Road and Colmore Lane running up to the Forestry Commission land at Burnt Platt in the north. It is largely wooded with Birch Oak and Aspen but includes some lovely glades with heather gorse and other wild flowers. It is crisscrossed with many informal and formal footpaths.

The Conservators aim is to protect the Commons and to preserve the rural nature of the area – the Parish Council has a similar objective reinforced by the results of the 2011 Community Plan.

The Conservators deal with many issues throughout the year such as footpath maintenance, access over common land, preservation of verges and edges and repairs to roads that are on the Commons.

One such item has been the report by a resident of a potentially dangerous situation near an ancient chalk pit on Peppard Common where an informal footpath runs close to a steep drop. Warning notices have been erected and next week the footpath will be re-routed and the old footpath blocked off.

## **ROTHERFIELD PEPPARD: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

Held at Peppard War Memorial Hall, GallowsTree Road, Rotherfield Peppard  
on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 10:00 am.

The Conservators have limited finances partly raised by subscriptions from membership of the Friends of the Commons from South Oxfordshire District Council and donations from Parishes including Rotherfield Peppard.

Work on the Commons is also undertaken by the Green Gym who can be seen on Peppard and Kingwood 4 or 5 times a year. They will be working on Peppard next Thursday the 25<sup>th</sup> making the changes to the footpaths I have just mentioned.

In the last eighteen months a lot of work has been undertaken by the Kingwood and Peppard Common Volunteers who were founded by Ann and Graham Pearce and are now run under the auspices of the Conservators. They meet at 9:30 on the first Saturday of each month and all are welcome if you are interested please tell the Commons Clerk – see the website again.

The next meeting which I will be leading is Saturday May 4<sup>th</sup> – the Bank Holiday weekend when we will be meeting in the carpark near the Red House on Stoke Row Road and we will be clearing the concrete pathway that runs near there.”

### **7. Peppard School.- Ian Herriot**

Ian Herriot explained that it had been an eventful year with the newly appointed head falling ill last November. This gave the governors a serious issue as OCC has no ‘stand-in’ head teacher, but luckily the head teacher at South Stoke agreed to manage Peppard School as well.

Following a lengthy recruitment process, Nick Steele has been appointed the New Head teacher and will start in September 2013.

The land for the new school has been purchased and full planning permission has been achieved – however funding still needs to be resolved – OCC are suffering from financial problems so are unable to provide any funding at this time - so the building of the new school will need to be deferred.

Nick Steele, the new Head teacher introduced himself and said he was looking forward to working with the local community.

### **8. Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) – Barrie Greenwood.**

Barrie Greenwood explained that the NDP will contain a vision of an improved village detailing the future development for business, recreation and housing. Sonning Common has been advised by SODC that they will need to take an additional 152 houses in the next 10 years and it is predicted that this could result in an additional 450 people in the village. This will have an impact on traffic, health facilities and employment

To accommodate the extra 152 houses, a number of sites in and around Sonning Common have been identified by SODC as possible areas for development. One of these sites is in Kidmore End and one (called SON 13) is in Rotherfield Peppard next to Johnson Matthey on Blounts Court Road. Rotherfield Peppard Parish Council has agreed that SON 13 can be included in the Sonning Common NDP – with the agreement that nothing can be decided about this site without consulting neighbouring residents and without RPPC being part of the decision making.

The process for creating an NDP is long and must follow certain steps. Over 200 surveys have been completed already including housing, business and land owners surveys. In addition there have been public meetings and more to follow. Neighbouring parishes must also be consulted.

**ROTHERFIELD PEPPARD: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

Held at Peppard War Memorial Hall, GallowsTree Road, Rotherfield Peppard  
on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 10:00 am.

This a long process and when formulated the Plan will need to be approved by SODC, then an examining inspector and finally the public will decide by vote whether they support it. If approved the Plan will become part of the SODC planning strategy

9. **Open Forum/Questions from the public**

**Traffic Calming**

Members of the Public raised various issues regarding traffic and highways -. Everyone was encouraged to log their issues with OCC Highways. Road signs need cleaning. Speeding is particularly bad outside the Unicorn Pub. Footpath outside Mulberry House needed addressing. Cars were still being parked on pathways – blocking access for pedestrians. An action list for highway improvements was needed.

**Horses on Commons**

A member of the Public raised the issue horses being ridden on the Commons

**Notice Board – Top Common**

A member of the Public explained that it was impossible to put drawing pins in the Notice Board on the Top Common as it was too hard.

The meeting ended at 12 noon

**Adopted as a true and accurate record:**

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....